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OO RUEHLN RUEHPOD RUEHVK RUEHYG  
DE RUEHMO #3089 2941339  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
O 201339Z OCT 08  
FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0438  
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHDX/MOSCOW POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

UNCLAS MOSCOW 003089

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [KCRM](#) [PREF](#) [KS](#)

SUBJECT: INSURGENTS IN INGUSHETIYA TARGET FEDERAL TROOPS

11. (SBU) Summary: The internet-based Caucasian Knot has confirmed only three deaths from an attack on a convoy of federal troops in Ingushetiya, not the 50 claimed by the jihadist Kavkaz Center website and the opposition Ingushetiya.org website. While initial reports of major casualties appear unsubstantiated, the fact that insurgents have raised the stakes by targeting the FSB is noteworthy. International assistance organizations implementing USG-funded humanitarian projects report that security conditions have deteriorated dramatically in the past several days. End Summary.

12. (SBU) Internet-based media sources have painted different pictures of events in Ingushetiya over the weekend. The opposition Ingushetiya.org website posted a story over the weekend that on October 18 insurgents had attacked two convoys of Russian federal law enforcement troops with rocket-propelled grenades and automatic weapons near the village of Galashki, resulting in 50 deaths. This report may have been based on a claim by the jihadist Kavkaz Center website. The more reliable Caucasian Knot, citing a spokesperson from the Ingushetiya Ministry of Internal Affairs, initially posted on its website that two FSB troops had died during a single attack and updated this information on October 19 by adding the name of a third soldier who died. Caucasian Knot stated that federal troops had sealed off the villages of Muzhichi and Galashki in the Sunzha District of southern Ingushetiya. It also reported October 20 that the previous night there was a car bomb attack on a Special Forces base in the town of Karabulak, several kilometers east of Ingushetiya's largest city Nazran, as well as small arms fire upon police stations throughout Ingushetiya. Moscow-based news outlets also reported other attacks and special operations over the weekend in which several persons died.

13. (SBU) A member of the local staff of International Rescue Committee (IRC) passed by after the attack on the convoy and reported seeing at least two helicopter ambulances lifting away casualties. The head of World Vision International's operations in the northern Caucasus has noticed a notable downward spiral in the security situation in Ingushetiya over the last several days. She said that World Vision will be taking additional measures to increase security, particularly for movements of personnel to and from project sites throughout Ingushetiya. The acting head of International Medical Corps told us that members of his local guard force reported that half of the police officers in Ingushetiya have resigned. The head of IRC's operations agreed and added he heard rumors that residents of Ingushetiya were "leaving the republic in greater numbers."

Comment  
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14. (SBU) Insurgents may have tried to use the tension surrounding the planned October 19 protest rally in Nazran against the perceived bias in the official investigation of the death of opposition leader Magomed Yevloyev to further

escalate instability with attack. The protest has been postponed and its organizer Magomed Khazbiyev announced on October 18 that it would take place in Moscow and not in Nazran. This latest incident may also be the last assault before winter sets in on the northern Caucasus. Whatever the reason for the increased violence, the attack on Russian troops is a disconcerting escalation of violence which heretofore had targeted mainly local police and public officials.

BEYRLE